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Inclusion or Integration: Towards Conceptual Clarity in the Provision of Special Needs Education in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper is informed by the view that by accepting the principles enunciated in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, Zimbabwe opted for inclusion as its guiding philosophy in the provision of Special Needs Education. In the light of this, the paper further presents the situation of Special Needs Education as it has historically developed in Zimbabwe, noting that it was, and largely informed by the philosophy of integration. The argument is then made that there is need for conceptual clarity if integration and inclusion are not to be confused in the provision of Special Needs Education so that the focus should be on inclusive education for which Zimbabwe has opted. In other words, it is noted that while inclusion is the preferred concept, it appears that integration predominates the practice in Special Needs Education in Zimbabwe. This predominance largely emanates from policy documents that have been produced over the years to give guidance to those involved in the provision of Special Needs Education. Even scholars who have written on Special Needs Education in Zimbabwe tend to betray a lack of conceptual clarity between these two concepts as they tend to use them interchangeably. Thus, primary sources in the form of policy documents from government ministries and secondary sources in the form of articles by scholars on Special Needs Education are discussed. It is maintained in this article that lack of conceptual clarity often results in lack of progress towards the attainment of the preferred philosophy.

Introduction

Zimbabwe, as a participant at Salamanca accepted the principles of inclusion enunciated in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for

Action on Special Needs Education of 1994. Prior to the Salamanca Statement Zimbabwe had committed itself to the goals set at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Spain. Zimbabwe is one of those countries that are signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, Dakar Framework for Action. All these instruments are aimed at enhancing the development and accessibility of education. While the main goals of the Jomtien Conference were to: 'Get all children into school' and 'Give all children the most suitable education', the Salamanca conference, among other things, stressed:

- The right of all children, including those with temporary and permanent needs for educational adjustments, to attend school
- The right of all children to attend school in their home community in inclusive classes
- The right of all children to participate in a child centred education meeting individual needs
- The enrichment and benefits all those involved will derive through the implementation of inclusive education
- The right of all children to participate in a *quality* education that is *meaningful* for each individual
- The belief that inclusive education will lead to an inclusive society and ultimately to cost effectiveness (Skjorten, 2001:29).

Thus Salamanca resulted in a commitment to inclusive education among the participating countries. Zimbabwe, as a signatory also opted to follow the philosophy of inclusion in the provision of special needs education. This claim is buttressed by the UNESCO Report which indicates Zimbabwe's option for special needs education as including:

- Ensuring equity in the provision and delivery of education services with special focus on marginalized

groups including the girl child, children of migrant/seasonal labourers, orphaned children and children living with disabilities.

- Strengthening partnership between government, parents, the community, and the private sector in meeting the cost of education and teacher training.
- Teacher empowerment for excellence and inclusive practice
- Provision for learners with disabilities and other special needs (Baeza, 2002:126-127)

Yet all along, though not the official philosophy, some institutions in Zimbabwe, even those responsible for policy formulation had been guided by the philosophy first of segregation and later of integration. It is this context that has resulted in conceptual mix up in the provision of special needs education in Zimbabwe. Conceptual clarity is essential if one is to avoid sending wrong signals to those responsible for policy implementation and explication. Another benefit of conceptual clarity is responsible and proper use of terms which quite often leads to understanding. Furthermore, conceptual clarity enables one to judge whether or not there has been any policy shift, to appreciate the challenges that are likely to be encountered in translating a concept into a programme, leads to informed appropriate strategies, decision – making, and is also important for those responsible for implementing the concept. This is especially the case with teachers as Ungerleider (as cited in Mushoriwa, 2002:83) argues, 'When teachers resist a change, the change will only be implemented with considerable social dislocation and high social cost'. Quite often resistance in implementing ideas and concepts is a result of lack of understanding and appreciation of issues at hand.

Background

In colonial Zimbabwe, the provision of special needs education was left to individual charitable organisations that followed the philosophy of segregation (Hulley, 1980). The early missionaries

and such organizations as the Jairos Jiri Association were motivated more by religious and humanitarian considerations than by the recognition of the right of people living with disability to education. The colonial government had no national policy to guide the provision of special needs education to African children (Peresuh & Barcham, 1998:75). As a result of this lack of policy on special education, the Zimbabwe National Disability Survey carried out in 1981, established that 52.4 % of all people living with disability in Zimbabwe had never been to school (Chimedza, 1999:1). Only 16.5 % had attended school for up to two years while 28.2 % had completed primary school. Only one percent had proceeded to secondary education (Chimedza, 1999:1). At independence in 1980, there were only twenty schools for pupils with special educational needs (Peresuh & Barcham, 1998:75).

While the numbers of pupils living with disability increased in schools as a result of the Education Act of 1987 (revised 1996) that made education available to all children, the Act did not directly address the question of the provision of education to persons living with disability. While the Act states, 'every child in Zimbabwe shall have the right to school education' it is not inclusive of children with disabilities. It becomes even clearer that the crafters of the Act were not conscious to the needs of children with disabilities when they mentioned all other disadvantaged groups except children with disabilities: "No child in Zimbabwe shall be refused admission to any school on the grounds of race, tribe, colour, religion, creed, place of origin, political opinion or the social status of his parents". Thus, the Education Act did not directly address the needs of children with disability who continued to be marginalised in the provision of education.

The formulation of the Disabled Persons Act in 1992 was a positive development in that it demonstrated an awareness of the needs of people living with disabilities. The Act provided for the establishment of the National Disability Board which was tasked with among other things the formulation and development of measures and policies designed to:

i) achieve equal opportunities for disabled persons by ensuring, so far as possible, that they obtain education and employment, participate fully in sporting, recreation and cultural activities and are afforded full access to community and social services;

ii) enable disabled persons, so far as possible, to lead independent lives...

iii) prevent discrimination against disabled persons resulting from or arising out of their disability...

iv) encourage and secure the rehabilitation of disabled persons within their own communities and social environment;

v) encourage and secure the establishment of vocational rehabilitation centres, social employment centres and other institutions and services for the welfare and rehabilitation of disabled persons.

Commenting on the Disabled Persons Act, Mpofu (2000:149) notes that it 'does not commit the Zimbabwean Government to inclusive education in any concrete way'. In other words, it does not commit the government to the provision of special needs education. Its reference to the provision of special needs education is very thin. At the same time the Disabled Persons Act fell under the Ministry of Public Service, not the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. The Act further fails to link with the Education Act. It can be interpreted as recognition of the lack of specific and elaborate reference to the provision of education to pupils with special needs in the Education Act and the Disabled Persons Act that the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture made use of circulars to give direction and advice to those involved in the provision of special needs education

While Peresuh (1994:24) argues that the policy of integration became the official national policy in 1983 with the formation of the School Psychological Services, the first explicit indication of a policy on special needs education was in 1987 when the Government of Zimbabwe introduced integration as its guiding policy. "New

strategies have been formulated as special education has come into line with national policy by attempting to ensure equal educational opportunity for children with handicaps into normal school", stated the Ministry of Education (Peresuh & Barcham, 1998:76). In pursuing the policy of integration, the Ministry of Education through the Chief Education Officer's Circular No. 3/89 (1989) compelled all special schools that had previously followed their own curricula to now follow the regular school curricula designed by the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Culture. The schools were also to present their pupils for public examinations so they could compete with other pupils on the job market. Another document from the Ministry of Education that reinforced the policy of integration was the Secretary for Education Circular Minute No. P 36 (1990) which described placement procedures to be followed in sending pupils to special classes, integrated resource rooms as well as special schools. In so doing, as is noted by Peresuh & Barcham (1998), the circular identified three types of educational provision for pupils with special educational needs, that is, special classes, special schools, and resource rooms. The circular directed that pupils were to be placed in these institutions in consultation with the parents, the school, and the School Psychological Services. That the policy followed by the Government of Zimbabwe was that of integration was further reinforced by the Special Education Policy Statement, which states among its objectives:

- the early detection, intervention and prevention of handicaps;
- the *integration*, where possible, of children with handicaps into ordinary schools;
- the development of *resource centres* to localise integration (italics added).

As Chimedza (1999) argues, what is clear is that, after independence, Zimbabwe shifted away from concentrating on special institutions towards providing education in integrated

Yet he was quite aware of the existence of arguments against the use of the term integration

settings. He states, "Various terms have been used to describe the concept of children with special educational needs learning together with ordinary students: integration ... inclusion, and mainstreaming" (Chimedza, 1999:3). However, Chimedza does not try to distinguish these terms. He presents them as if they were synonyms. In fact in another article, Chimedza (2001.35) identifies inclusion with total integration. The same can also be said about Peresuh and Barcham (1998:78), and Peresuh (1994) when they acknowledged advancement towards integration in the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs. In fact, Peresuh (1994: 24) while acknowledging that Zimbabwe has opted for integration argues that 'total integration' of children with special educational needs is not possible. Peresuh (2001:17) appears to have developed a different view as he then argued for the inclusive education with reference to mentally retarded children. He then delineated the differences between inclusion and integration arguing that in inclusive schools, 'parents, teachers, administrators and peers are partners' and work together with children with disabilities. On the other hand, integration is characterised by children with disabilities occasionally visiting regular classes usually for non-academic activities (Peresuh, 2001:18). Chimedza (2001) was aware that in integration, the child with disability and the specialist teachers could remain outsiders, or visitors to the mainstream school. It is therefore necessary for the situation to be arranged so that the child with disability and the specialist teacher become part and parcel of the main school. The problem with integration is that there is always the possibility of isolation of the child with disability. These authors tend to use the terms interchangeably and at times use integration to explain inclusion. This results in blurred conception of the difference between the two terms.

For Mushoriwa (2002:89), inclusion is not a possibility in Zimbabwe and other African countries. The main reasons that he presents for arguing so are that, developing countries lack the necessary human, financial and material resources needed to fully implement inclusive education, teachers in Zimbabwe are not well prepared for inclusive classes, the children with special needs will

not benefit much from inclusive settings as they will continue to feel out of place. There is a lot that needs to be done before developing countries can embrace inclusive education.

Conceptual confusion is evident in works that tend to use integration and inclusion interchangeably. Chimedza (1999:3) noted increasing trends towards integration which he says is in line with 'the concept of inclusive education'. Pang and Richey (2005: 129) argue that the practice in Zimbabwe points towards integration. The existence of special needs institutions separate from regular schools, the prevalence of disadvantaged children outside the education system (children living in streets in all towns and cities) are all indications that it might be too early for Zimbabwe to claim to be following the philosophy of inclusion. But this can only become clear if we are clear about the difference between integration and inclusion.

Conceptual Clarity

Integration

The concept of integration implies sending children with special educational needs to a unit or class within the regular kindergarten or school. It involves children with special educational needs learning together with their peers in regular classes but proceeding to special classes or units within the same school. According to Gartener and Lipsky (as cited in Peresuh, 2001:21) integration is the 'placement of (special) classes in general school buildings which are the chronological age- appropriate sites for the students' and 'participation ... in all non academic activities of the school' and 'implementation of a functional life skills curriculum'. Skjorten (2001:36-37) discusses five models of integration.

Model 1

The first model is the 'once in a while a common cultural event'. In this model children with special educational needs once in a while find themselves interacting in a common cultural event with their able bodied peers. They are taken to sites where they can interact with their able bodied peers.

Model 2: The Physical Integration Model

In this model there are two or more institutions within one. In one instance, the two schools have no common activities and do not have recess at the same time. In this instance the children with special educational needs are on the same premises but without common activities with their peers in the regular school. In some instances, the two schools may have recess at the same time and pupils may interact. But there are no planned activities to encourage interaction among the pupils. In the third instance, children with special educational needs may be placed in the same class with their peers yet no extra attention to their special needs is provided to them.

Model 3: Sporadic or systematic participation

In this model there are intermittent common activities between children with special educational needs and their peers in the regular classes. These activities may be in music classes, arts and crafts, or sporting activities.

Model 4: Regular participation

The fourth model involves regular activities by pupils with disabilities in an ordinary class in specific subjects.

Model 5: Full participation

In this model the children with special educational needs, in principle fully participate in ordinary classes. They proceed to special units or resource rooms after the regular class for specialised learning. The problem with this model is that the children have no time for recreational activities with other members of the class.

To illustrate these models, Skjorten (2001) makes use of two circles which group the various models of integration into two:

Illustration 1: Integration a common model (Skjorten, 2001:37)

This diagram represents a scenario in which children with special educational needs are given instruction in separate settings with the aim of integrating them into the regular class.

Regular class Special class

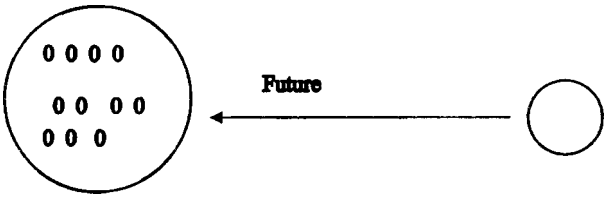
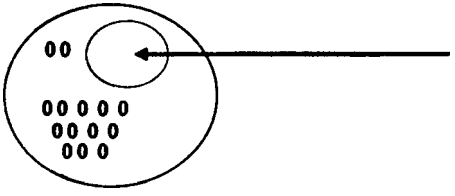


Illustration 2: Integration – a common model continued (Skjorten, 2001:37)

In this model pupils with special educational needs make regular visits to the regular class for common learning activities with their peers. This may also be with reference to a particular subject.

In this arrangement, there may or may not be a special teacher.



This makes the pupils with disabilities 'guests' in the school.

It is important to note that whatever model of integration one takes what is common to all is that the child with impairment is the one who adjusts to the demands of the system (Skjorten, 2001) or the school (Mushoriwa, 2002). As noted by Peresuh (2001:23) integration locates students' 'learning and behaviour problems within the child'. The system or the school remains the same. As a consequence, the child with special educational needs remains an outsider, or more appropriately a visitor to the ordinary class. The children will lack the sense of belonging to the class or identification with other children. They remain isolated though among their peers. It is in this context that integration and its promotion of special institutions has been castigated by those who believe in the equality of all children. These have argued for inclusion as the philosophy that should guide the provision of education to all children. They

view integration as promoting the dumping of children with disabilities in institutions that do not adequately prepare them for life in the communities in which they will live. In other words integrationists are contented with the physical presence of children with special educational needs in ordinary schools.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion implies a paradigm shift resulting in change in the system or the school or the class to accommodate the child with special educational needs. Peresuh (2001) points out that inclusion is a deconstruction of integration. It problematises the notion of special education, special classes and labelling (Peresuh, 2001.21). Special education is viewed as the major impediment to addressing the needs of children with disability. Rather than perceive the child with disability as the problem, focus is shifted to the system. It is the environment or the system that must change, that finds what it can do for the child with special educational needs (Mushoriwa, 2002; Skjorten, 2001). In other words in inclusive education, it is the support services that are taken to the child rather than the child going to the services as it is based on the belief that all children have a right to attend and belong in the regular schools without discrimination. In this context the child is to go to the school nearest to his or her home. The child with special educational needs has to participate in the life of the school on equal terms with other students. Inclusion does not, as some critics would want to argue, remove the services and support that children with special educational needs need.

Bunch (as cited in Peresuh, 2001.22) argues:

> Full inclusion (FI) in the educational sense, argues that all students must have the opportunity to be enrolled in the regular classroom of the neighbourhood school with age – appropriate peers, or to attend the same school as their brothers and sisters. FI in the regular classroom requires that regular students and those with some type of challenge to their learning receive appropriate educational programmes that are challenging and yet geared to their capabilities and

needs as well as any support or assistance they or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream.

On inclusion Skjorten (2001, 38) wrote:

> Inclusive families, schools, or classrooms are where:
>
> - all children (or adults) are members of the same group
> - interacting and communicating with each other
> - helping each other to learn and function
> - taking considerations to each other
> - accepting the fact that some children (or adults) have needs that differ from the majority and will at times do different things

This is in line with what Giorcelli (as cited Mushoriwa, 2002:85) regarded as characteristics of successful inclusion:

i) zero rejection philosophy. As already said, the child with disability must be accepted fully by the school, teachers and peers. The child must be accepted physically, socially and instructionally;

ii) age and grade appropriate placements in neighbourhood schools. Placing the child in his/ her age group is likely to make him socially acceptable;

iii) co-operative learning. His/her peers must be willing to learn together with him/her, tolerating the child's difficulties and sharing ideas with him/her; and

iv) special educational support given to regular education. This involves making available to the child, special learning materials and equipment, extra human resources such as assistant teachers etc. to facilitate the child's learning.

In an inclusive school all children belong together. There is a common bond among the learners, teachers and parents. Their activities are characterised by cooperation, equality, respect, consideration, assisting each other, empathising with each other

and an acceptance that some of them are different and would therefore require different things. Because there is a sense of belonging and identification, the need for special services by pupils with disability is understood by members of the group, school, or class. In inclusive education all pupils are provided with the opportunity to interact and form relationships. It is in this context that one can say that inclusive education is a process through which children discover their similarities, rather than their differences, and focus on their strengths, not on their weaknesses (www.spannj.org/BasicRights/least_restrictive_environment.htm, 2006).

It is also important to note that while in some discussions inclusion is presented as a disability issue, there is also a wider conception 'to do with all children who have historically been marginalized in schools' (Dyson, 2003:125). Such children in addition to children with disabilities include child beggars, minority children, homeless children, displaced children, institutionalized children, orphans, children affected by HIV and AIDS, children living in poverty and immigrant children (Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2002: 28). Thus inclusive education is informed by among other things, the principles of equity and participation (Clark, Dyson, Millward & Skidmore, 1997: 80). In this context inclusive education is characterised by free and equal access to education by all children. The aim is equal participation by all children in the communities in which they live. It is not a question of physical presence but of *complete involvement* by disadvantaged and vulnerable children (Smith, Austin & Kennedy, 2001:20).

From the above it is clear that integration and inclusion are two divergent concepts that should not be confused if justice is to be done to disadvantaged children. While integration is system focused and tends to make the child feel out of place, inclusion is child centred and seeks to create enabling conditions for the child and develop a sense of belonging to the class, school, and community. Inclusive education respects the right of the child to education in the locality.

Conclusion

Claims that we are practicing inclusion at this stage appear to be misleading to say the least. In terms of desire, as indicated in our being signatory to Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, and the Dakar Framework for Action, we would prefer inclusion but in terms of the practical reality on the ground we are still practicing integration. When we have units in ordinary schools which are 'classes in their own rights' in which the teaching of 'almost all subjects is undertaken', it is clear from our discussion of the two concepts that what we are practicing is integration. Peresuh and Barcham (1998) argued that these units, in which integration occur 'during play time, co-curricular activities and assemblies are the common forms of educational provision for children with special educational needs'. This being the case, if Zimbabwe is indeed committed to the philosophy of inclusion, it is essential to put in place mechanisms that ensure inclusive education. These include training of teachers to handle inclusive schools and classrooms. It also entails massive conscientisation programmes for society to understand what inclusion means and what is required for it to succeed. Human and financial resources need to be invested into creating conditions that will promote inclusive education. Inclusive education is unavoidable if we believe in the equality of all people, that all people must have access to education in schools nearest to them, that the parents have a role to play in the education of their children, and that education must be child centred if the learners are to benefit from it. The success of inclusive education in Zimbabwe depends on understanding what inclusive education is, and what it entails. However, conceptual clarity would need to be accompanied by the necessary enabling legislation, change in attitude by the community as a whole as well as the reorganisation of the whole education system in ways that promote the achievement of inclusive education. All children need to have equal access to education and to equally benefit from the education that is available.

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